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What do the Dying Want?

By Sara Baker

What do the dying want?
Do they want words: “tulip,”
“beach,” “son,” “daughter,” “love”?
Or are words grapple hooks, dragging
them back, unwilling, to the
morass of the living?

What do the dying want?
Music to fill the cups of their
ears? Gentle vibration of violin,
of harp? Soaring arias or plaintive hymns?
Or does music distract them from
their deep burrowing?

What do the dying want?
The nape of the neck caressed,
a hand laid lightly on the brow,
a cheek pressed to gaunt cheek?
Or to be left alone, to slip modestly
from their bodies when no one is looking,
to leave without causing a fuss?

What do the dying want?
They don't tell us; they lie
still on their beds, eyes shuttered,
the bony architecture of nose
rising above the cavern of mouth,
air sucked in like wind,
the chest rising and falling,
that heart laboring on, a good
faithful horse, until it too
gives out.

No one knows what the dying want.
Wanting is what the living do.

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Sara Baker is a fiction writer and poet. Her work has appeared in H.O.W., Confrontation, China Grove Journal, The Examined Life, Chattahoochee Review, The New Quarterly, The Spirit that Moves Us, as well as The 2011 Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine, The Healing Muse, Ars Medica, Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine, Journal of Poetry Therapy, and Negative Capability Press Anthology of Georgia Poetry. She is the author of a poetry chapbook, Brancusi's Egg (Finishing Line Press, 2013) and created Woven Dialog Writing Workshops to aid in facilitating the healing process. For more, go to Word Medicine, saratbaker.wordpress.com.